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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 002012

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [NL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/VENEZUELA: KEEPING RELATIONS GOOD

REF: A. A. STATE 154174

[1](#)B. B. STATE 133106

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Classified By: Michael Gallagher, CDA, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On November 19, Charge delivered reftel A points to Laurent Stokvis, Director of the Department of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Anton Schellekens, Desk Officer for Kingdom (i.e, Aruba and Antilles) Affairs, and Wendy Engelberts, Desk Officer for Venezuela. Stokvis emphasized positive relations with Venezuela. At the same time, he explained that the trend in Venezuela also worries us, but details are lacking to make any specific charges of human rights violations. Post believes the Dutch will continue to stress keeping relations good with Venezuela. END SUMMARY.

KEEPING RELATIONS GOOD

[1](#)2. (C) Reviewing reftel A points with Charge, Stokvis responded our basic policy is keeping relations good. Joint Dutch-Venezuelan naval exercises earlier this year were a successful confidence building exercise. On a practical level, executive branch to executive branch, cooperation is good, except at the political level. Other Dutch agencies

just pick up the phone to resolve problems. The Dutch don't have a sense that Venezuela has territorial ambitions right now. Venezuela has not affected Caribbean tourism. The Dutch are looking at these elements and for opportunities to engage positively.

13. (C) Stokvis also stated the trend in Venezuela also worries us, but details are lacking to make any specific charges of human rights or Venezuelan Constitutional violations. First, the Dutch don't know the exact content of the proposed constitutional reforms. The government has made proposed reforms, and the parliament approved a counterproposal. It's important to have a clear idea of what you're criticizing to avoid losing the argument with Chavez, who will hold up different constitutions to rebut any criticisms. The Dutch prefer to look at specific Venezuelan actions rather than focus on controversial laws. At the same time, Stokvis welcomed further specific information about human rights violations, and asserted that the Netherlands will comply with its human rights obligations. He also expressed an interest in knowing about specific violations by Chavez of the Venezuelan Constitution.

14. (C) Stokvis added that the Dutch are watchful of Venezuelan actions, and all is clearly not well. Political relations are not effective -- the Dutch embassy cannot get meetings with the Venezuelan MFA. Schellekens said that Curacao and Bonaire could face a refugee problem if there is violence in Venezuela. Stokvis theorized that Chavez could always try to escape a domestic political problems with an attack on the islands.

CAUTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS CRITIQUES

15. (C) Venezuela Desk Officer Engelberts earlier expressed caution on criticizing the human rights situation in Venezuela. Discussing reftel B points with POLOFF on September 28, she noted that the Dutch were waiting to see the results of the constitutional referendum on December 2 or 9. Engelberts acknowledged the Constitution would concentrate powers with the central government, but it was unclear how the reforms would affect local government. If human rights were affected, the EU would react. The Dutch raise human rights with every visit, but hadn't received notifications of abuses or visits by human rights defenders about Venezuela. Current polling suggests the people of Venezuela may not support the new constitution, but Chavez may include enough social reforms -- such as a shorter work day -- to pull in the needed votes.

16. (C) In a conversation on August 30, 2007, Ms. Gertie Mulder, head of the Dutch MFA's South America Division, said Chavez was shocked by the reaction to his decision to close Radio Caracas Television. She was encouraged by the decision of the Venezuelan Supreme Court to permit cable broadcasts from Miami. Venezuela has a tradition of media freedom.

DOWNPLAYING FRICTION WITH VENEZUELA

17. (C) Mulder also downplayed friction with Venezuela after the Dutch press reported on Venezuelan President Chavez's August 15, 2007 remarks suggesting that everything within 200

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miles of the Venezuelan coast belonged to Venezuela. (NOTE: the Netherlands Antilles lie 40 miles from the Venezuelan coast. END NOTE.) The MFA did not react publicly to Chavez's remarks until Dutch legislator Hans Van Baalen (Liberal Party) promised to make inquiry, and asserted that Venezuela should stay away from our Falklands. On August 21, the MFA stated publicly that the Dutch ambassador in Venezuela had been instructed to ask the GOV for clarification of Venezuela's intentions. Asked about Dutch-Venezuelan discussions, Mulder noted that the

Netherlands will continue to emphasize its good neighbor policy. The Dutch characterized the press reports as inaccurate -- Chavez had not included the Netherlands Antilles when he gestured to purported Venezuelan possessions on a map of the Caribbean.

¶18. (C) Similarly, on Venezuelan arms acquisitions, the Netherlands does not see a threat. Mulder implied that the EU Code of Conduct was an appropriate and adequate tool to respond.

COMMENT

¶19. (C) Although post will continue to engage MFA contacts, parliament and NGOs about the human rights situation in Venezuela, we do not expect the Dutch to publicly take a tough line with Chavez barring extreme human rights abuses or threats to Dutch economic and territorial interests in the Caribbean. We found Stokvis generally more concerned about keeping an even keel with Chavez than rocking his boat. With respect to Venezuela, pragmatism prevails at the Dutch MFA. That said, we welcome the opportunity to re-engage with the MFA, especially if we have specific information regarding violations of human rights and/or legal norms to share with our Dutch colleagues. END COMMENT.
Gallagher